

By Joseph Diescho

NAMIBIA, A TERRITORY THAT HAS BEEN occupied by South Africa since 1915, is the only country in the world over which the United Nations claims full responsibility. There is consensus that South Africa should leave the territory, but how South Africa should relinquish its control has not been resolved. This lack of consensus led to the events that transpired in Namibia a few hours after the cease-fire between South Africa and the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) came into effect on April 1.

Two things are clear. First, South Africa started the fight that has left many people dead—SWAPO combatants as well as civilians in northern Namibia (see story on page 10). It really does not take much to explain why South Africa attacked SWAPO. South Africa has for many decades refused to recognize the right of the Namibian people to elect their representatives. South Africa agreed to the process that would lead to Namibia's independence neither out of free will nor due to a change of heart, but because of political, diplomatic and economic pressures, internal and international. These included the deteriorating situation inside South Africa that led to the current state of emergency and all restrictions, the selective armed struggle by the the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, the disintegration of white electoral cohesiveness in South Africa and the growing ineptness of the National Party government.

The war that SWAPO has waged in Namibia for over 22 years, culminating in the Battle

U.N. helps South Africa keep control of Namibia

of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola, where South Africa was dealt a humiliating military defeat by Angola with the assistance of Cuba's internationalist forces, and the threat of mandatory comprehensive economic sanctions have also been decisive in forcing South Africa to negotiate with Angola, Cuba and the U.S. last year.

The reality is that the choices left to those who want white domination in southern Africa are constantly diminishing. South Africa is not as invincible and intractable as many apologists of apartheid would like us to believe. The defenders of apartheid have begun to appreciate that the days of this system—secure white privilege and unquestioned white supremacy—are numbered. Now the best way to defend apartheid is to make things look different, reformist, thus more complex and confusing.

U.N. in error: As for Namibia, South Africa never wanted to let it go. And the five Western powers of the U.N. Transition Assistance Group (the U.S., Canada, Britain, France and West Germany) have helped South Africa torpedo the original U.N. plan for Namibia's independence. This plan was articulated in U.N. Security Council Resolution 385, which stipulated essentially that South African police and military forces would withdraw so that the U.N. could take over during the period of transition. This made sense. If the

U.N. was to be able to execute its task without hindrance, neither SWAPO nor South Africa should be in charge of law and order. Every juridical system underscores that a party to a dispute cannot be a judge (*nome judex in sua causa*, the Romans intoned judicially). Yet the U.N. has succumbed to South Africa's blackmail by ignoring this basic principle.

Not only has the U.N. gone against its own sentiments by falling short of Resolution 435—which set up the framework for the peace process—and allowing events to deteriorate in Namibia, but it has also forgotten the problem it was trying to resolve, namely to free Namibia from South Africa. Namibia's independence has been stalled for more than 10 years due to the refusal of South Africa and the U.S. to implement the U.N. plan, and the U.N. has appeased South Africa by playing a secondary role in the process. Why did U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar accept the Western compromise that South Africa be in charge of Namibia, when South Africa is the problem? Did not the U.N. declare South Africa's presence in Namibia illegal in 1969, and recognize SWAPO as the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people in 1973? Since then the U.N. has cooperated with SWAPO and treated South Africa as a pariah. Then when, how and why did the U.N. turn around and begin working in tandem with South Africa? The question many Namibians ask is this: if the U.N. is working with South Africa, then from whose occupation is Namibia to be freed?

Not only has the U.N. ignored the aspirations of the people whom it had been ready to help, but clearly it has turned a deaf ear to the pleas of the Frontline States of Southern Africa, the Organization of African Unity and many nations across the world sympathetic to the Namibians and their plight. The U.N. has chosen to collaborate with South Africa to wage a war of terror against those who have waited for decades for the U.N. to supervise a free and fair election toward independence.

Trying to conform: Reports from reliable sources in Namibia, including church leaders, lawyers, students and eyewitnesses, indicate that South Africa attacked SWAPO soldiers last month as the Namibian troops were trying to find the U.N. peacekeeping forces to whom they were to surrender themselves and their arms in the spirit of the formal cessation of hostilities.

Even if there was no infiltration by SWAPO guerrillas into Namibia from Angola, hundreds of guerrillas inside Namibia have been waging guerrilla war against South Africa for more than 22 years. Their presence alone could constitute adequate provocation so that South Africa could either justify attacking them or threaten to suspend the whole U.N. process—or both, as is the case now. There is also a long history that shows how South African officials would take advantage of any situation to prevent SWAPO from coming to power. South African officials have a deep-seated hatred of SWAPO, and South Africa has succeeded in casting doubt on SWAPO by tak-

ing advantage of the confusion around the two guideline agreements for Namibia's independence in 1990 (U.N. Resolution 435 and the Angola-Cuba-South Africa Agreement of Dec. 22, 1988).

The U.N. was not prepared to make provision for the immediate confinement to base of the SWAPO soldiers in Namibia at the time of the cease-fire. Worse, there were no U.N. peacekeeping forces in the northern Namibia war zone. The SWAPO soldiers were victims of a situation for which the U.N. secretary-general and his special representative in Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari, should take responsibility.

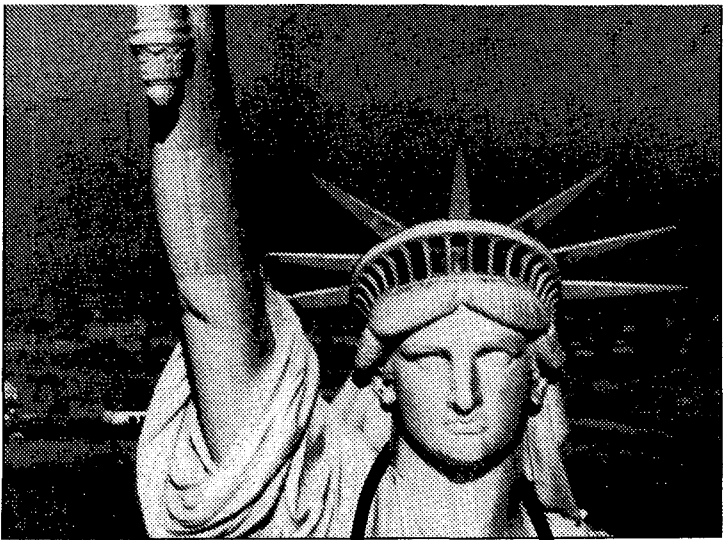
Two agreements: The protocols signed among Angola, Cuba and South Africa last December have been described as a tripartite agreement and nothing more. SWAPO is not a party to these agreements and therefore could not violate them. SWAPO did honor the agreement with the U.N. and was looking for the U.N. peacekeeping forces, without intent to fight, when it was attacked, even though it was incumbent upon South Africa to report SWAPO's incursion to the U.N. and not fire any shots.

If such an incursion was reported by South Africa to the U.N., the U.N. was obligated to investigate quickly and to keep SWAPO and South Africa from attacking one another. Instead, South Africa fired shots without involving the U.N., and later the U.N. authorized South Africa to reactivate its military and police to restore law and order. South Africa's idea of law and order was to shoot to kill SWAPO soldiers and innocent civilians in the presence and with the acquiescence of the U.N. officials.

Since the conflict started on April 1, many Namibians have come out and said that they tried several times to contact the U.N. The U.N. told them that there was nothing they could do about it and that it was for South Africa to restore law and order. At the time of the cease-fire and when the conflict erupted, less than one-quarter of the U.N. peacekeeping force had arrived in Namibia, and those troops were not even in the war zone.

As a result, many people wearing SWAPO T-shirts to celebrate the commencement of the peaceful transition were beaten and injured throughout the country by the South African police and soldiers maintaining law and order. If anything, this is a serious indictment of the U.N. Security Council and the special representative in Namibia who authorized the killings. SWAPO has never been the problem in Namibia, and the U.N. and the Western media should know this. They should stop blaming the victim for the offense of the real culprit. If the U.N. is to restore confidence in Namibia and show that it is not assisting South Africa to kill Namibian people, the U.N. secretary-general should come clean: accept responsibility, apologize formally to the Namibian people and see that his special representative in Namibia is recalled so that the process can be placed back on track in the spirit of the Mount Etjo Declaration that was signed on April 9 by Angola, Cuba and South Africa, with the U.S. and the Soviet Union acting as observers.

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Nahhalin: From March 1954 to April 1989

The tendency of journalists, as I suggested here a couple of weeks ago, is to describe the world in terms of either disaster or normalcy, without acknowledging that very often the former is merely a symbolic extension of the latter. Consider in this light the recent Israeli attack on the village of Nahhalin, a Palestinian village on the West Bank, some 10 miles from Bethlehem.

The predawn attack, launched at 4 a.m. on April 13 by hundreds of Israeli soldiers, left five Palestinians dead, many injured, and much livestock and property destroyed. Now in recent months U.S. coverage of the *intifada* has tended to take many things as "normal"—savage beatings that leave limbs broken, prolonged imprisonment in horrifying conditions without charges or trial—that a year ago were regarded as worthy of front-page coverage. The same has been true in South Africa, where a thoroughly docile U.S. press mostly follows the agenda of South African authorities, as for example in the coverage of the supposed SWAPO "invasion" of Namibia from Angola at the start of April (see pages 10 and 16).

The attack on Nahhalin did make the front pages, with some careful sanitizing, as we shall see. What almost all the reports did not mention is that murderous armed assault by Israeli troops is nothing new in Nahhalin's history. Thirty-five years and two weeks before the attack this spring, on March 29, 1954, Israeli troops attacked Nahhalin in the night hours. At the time, the population of the village stood at 300 (it has now risen to 4,500) and the village itself was in Jordan. When the troops withdrew, nine villagers lay dead and others critically wounded from an attack conducted with mines, grenades, automatic weapons and Molotov cocktail firebombs.

The way it was: The background to the attack was this. Since 1949 Israel, over the heated protests of the Israeli-Jordanian Mixed Armistice Commission, had been steadily encroaching on demilitarized zones around its new territory. The aim in the south, toward the Gaza Strip, was simply to acquire more land and to prepare for the ultimate attack on Egypt, to which end a large number of tribespeople, Bedouin Azazma and others, were driven from their land. A group of Bedouin organized retaliatory terror, including a bloody assault on a bus that left Israeli civilians dead. In further "retaliation" the Israelis attacked Nahhalin. I put quotation marks around retaliation here because Nahhalin, in Jordan, had no remote connection with the Bedouin, nor with any of the previous attacks.

It is not often that one can compare what a journalist actually wrote with what got printed in the newspaper—unless, that is, the journalist is old enough, rich enough, or sufficiently pissed off not to care about offending the relevant previous (or in very rare cases, present) employer. The *New York Times* correspondent covering the 1954 assault on Nahhalin was Kennett Love, a man I know and have come to esteem. Love has kept, over the years, his original dispatches, and one can compare what he wrote with what got printed.

The *Times*' front-page story for March 30, 1954, was not too bad, because Love had

filed such a detailed report that it probably presented his editors with a simple either/or on whether to suppress the whole thing. But the front-page single-column headline did perform a careful act of distancing. Love's report had in its fifth paragraph details attributed to U.N. observers, about bullets and shell casings marked with the Star of David and with Hebrew writing, and also a quote from Gen. John Glubb, British commander of Jordan's Arab Legion, to the effect that "the attack was well-planned and carried out by regular Israeli armed forces," but the three-line headline ran, "9 Slain in Jordan In Raid on Village: Israelis Blamed." Thus the attribution of responsibility is speculative.

(For historical interest, I should say that the adjacent main headline was announcing the start of the U.S. war in Vietnam: "Dulles Asks Unity To Block Red Rule/In Southeast Asia." James Reston's report began with the fateful words, "The Eisenhower administration has taken a fundamental policy decision to block the Communist conquest of Southeast Asia even if it has to take 'united action' with France and other countries to do so.")

Even so, Love's editors back in New York suppressed many of his details of Israeli threats against the chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission, and also his report that the chairman, U.S. Navy Cmdr. Elmo H. Hutchinson, had postponed a commission meeting "after his notification to Israeli delegation returned unopened with notation quoted unacceptable written across front." (Love's dispatches were in foreign correspondent's cable-ese, abbreviated to save money.) Similarly deleted were reactions from Jerusalem concerning the irrationality of an attack on Nahhalin in revenge for the terror assault in the Negev. The *New York* editors also removed two separate instances where Love reported witnesses saying that they heard the intruders speaking Hebrew and other unknown languages.

Love was reproached by his editors for "over-filing," meaning that he supplied too many details which were simply dropped, particularly when they detailed the violence of the attack, as in this suppressed passage: "she [the widow of a victim of the assault] said attackers had blown in orchard door with explosives ... she said they spoke Hebrew and other languages she knew ... while she and children huddled on floor two intruders sprayed room with machine guns."

A particularly notable distortion by the *New York Times*' editors involved the removal of a paragraph where Love noted, "Israeli Premier Moshe Sharett reported by Israeli radio tonight to have admitted attack outcarried by Israelis but denied regular troops involved." This was deleted, and instead the *Times* printed below Love's dispatch a piece by Harry Gilroy from the Israeli side of the border beginning, "Premier Moshe Sharett declared today that he had no direct knowledge of a reported killing of nine Jordanians at Nahhalin," and that it sounded like "a local affair" and was probably "exaggerated."

Love says now that the treatment from his editors, Emanuel Freedman and Nathaniel Gerstenzang, was "touchy and suspicious." He was criticized for calling the attackers "military units," and "Gersten-

zang didn't want to hear anything bad about the Israelis...there were so many things they refused to print and I was constantly accused of being one-sided. You had to document beyond belief." After reporting one Israeli attack in nearby Husan, Love, under challenge, went so far as to offer to send to New York "cartridge shells, bits of field dressing, a label on a dynamite pack." He also offered to get and send home a blood sample, since it was suggested that the stains might have come from the crafty "victims" throwing ox blood around.

Some things never change. In 1954 and again in 1989 the *New York Times* left out key details in its coverage of Israeli raids on a West Bank village.

The way it is: Come now to the attack of April 13, 1989, in which five were killed. In its account, the Database Project on Palestinian Human Rights notes, "Like other Palestinian villages, residents of Nahhalin have always taken a strong stand against the occupation and for a Palestinian state." Before April 13, Israeli border guards had tried to infiltrate the village on several occasions, only to be repelled by the villagers. Harassment became acute in the week leading up to the attack, according to the database, with border guards using loudspeakers to curse and issue sexually violent threats against women who were identified by their clothing and abused directly. The day before the massacre, border guards started dropping their pants when women walked past.

As in 1954, the assault came from a number of directions, with snipers posted to prevent villagers from escaping. One band of troops opened fire when they reached the first house belonging to Hasan Mustafa (whose grandfather had been killed in the 1954 raid). They discharged at least 50 rounds through the house's windows; shot at everything that moved, killing many animals including dogs, donkeys, sheep and rabbits; rounded people up and beat them in front of their parents and small children; and destroyed cars and shot at some people inside their houses.

As the database reports, Nahhalin villagers described the assault as the worst they had experienced in the occupation, comparing it to German Nazi abuses inflicted on Russian villagers. In one incident reported by the database, "They lifted a 14-year-old paraplegic youth, Jamil Mahmud Ahmad Najajri, crippled from birth, from his chair and threw him on the ground. He cannot now move his hands and fingers, which he needs to ambulate his wheelchair." Villagers had risen early because it was Ramadan, and were preparing for prayer or actually praying.

The *New York Times* article for April 14 was headed "Israelis Kill 5 in West Bank Village In One of Highest Tolls of Uprising." Joel Brinkley's dispatch opened with a careful emphasis: "Israeli border policemen shot and killed at least five and possibly as many as seven Palestinians today after they

were attacked by stone-throwing youths during a pre-dawn raid on this village." The insinuation, one zealously fostered by Gen. Amram Mitzna, the senior Israel commander on the West Bank, is that the border guards fired in defense against what Mitzna called "the violent attacks of the villagers."

Brinkley (or his editor) was careful to use the word "incident" to describe the attack and shooting deaths, with the term "massacre" being attributed to hospital attendants. The account of the circumstances of the raid—attempted arrest of stone-throwing youths; border guards surrounded by hostile crowds and firing in panic—is utterly at variance with the detailed database account, which describes the mass assault and the circumstances of the deaths, four of them caused by the border guards firing down from the roof of a house. As in the case of Love's published report, Brinkley's does not include much detail—perhaps he never sent any—of a sort readers might find overly discomfiting.

The way it isn't: A great issue was made by Brinkley, and subsequently by columnist Anthony Lewis and by Martin Peretz, editor in chief of *The New Republic*, that the attack was carried out by "border guards" or "border policemen," many of whom are "Arab-speaking Druse." Peretz, a degraded apologist for Israeli policies, went so far as to write in his *New Republic* column for May 8 (in which he also had an attack on me as an apologist for Stalin, since I had said in *The Nation* that Stalin was responsible for the deaths of some 5 million in the '30s), "When these units...are deployed, ancient rancors come into play without the full mediating discipline of a Western code of arms." In other words, the wogs hate each other; the Arabs did it; what can you expect of these uncivilized brutes? Anthony Lewis more decorously hinted at the same thing in his column.

This leaves readers presumably wondering what part has been played in the deaths at Israeli hands of the several hundred other victims of the *intifada* by the "full mediating discipline of a Western code of arms." Of course the excuse that these were Arab border guards out of control is ludicrous. The officers are Israeli Jews, just as other thugs of empire—Gurkhas under the British, Koevoet under South Africans—are troops trained for savagery by the sponsoring power, which is properly held responsible for what they do.

So much for the dead of Nahhalin. But there is a crisis for Israel here, undiscussed by Brinkley, Peretz or Lewis, but certainly a topic in the Israeli press. Israeli military analysts, such as Martin van Creveld in the *Jerusalem Post*, are becoming worried that suppression of the *intifada* is rapidly degrading the Israeli armed forces, rendering them into bullying thugs unfit for real war. The analogy here is with the Argentinian troops who were expert at killing civilians in the late '70s, but who crumbled when faced with trained British troops in the Falklands war. The second crisis is that more and more soldiers are becoming disillusioned with what is going on in the Occupied Territories; the number of refuseniks is growing and many members of *Yesh Gvul* (the refuseniks' movement) are not being prosecuted for refusing to serve in the suppression of the *intifada*. This at least might comfort the survivors of those two attacks on Nahhalin, 35 years apart. ■

This column was prepared with the help of Rich McKerrow.

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